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Americans Take to the Street to Protest Police

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WASHINGTON (NNPA) — On Saturday, thousands of Americans across the country registered their objection to police officers not being held accountable after killing unarmed citizens, many of them blacks, by mounting massive demonstrations and rallies, the main one held here in the nation's capital.

Organized by major civil rights organizations, the goal of the protest was to demand federal intervention in state prosecutorial systems that have failed to indict anyone in the police killings of victims such as Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, and Pearlle Golden.

"We must have this nation deal with the fact that just like 50 years ago, the states have taken a position to rob the human rights and civil rights of citizens with states rights-protected laws," said Al Sharpton, the rally's chief organizer.

The demands by Sharpton included: expanding the powers for the Justice Department to investigate state prosecution procedures; national legislation to lower the threshold for grand jury indictments of police officers; and independent special prosecutors to examine potential cases of police brutality or misconduct.

The march drew a multiracial, intergenerational sea of sign-toting citizens from all over the nation.

Wanda Sharif, from Beaumont, Texas, had already been in Washington to help care for her grandchild, but extended her visit to attend the march. The grandmother of seven recalled marching with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at 11 years old, and attending all-white schools until enrolling at Spelman College in Atlanta.

"I've been doing this for three generations. I have to be here to document for my grandchildren, so they know I was here," she says. "It's important that everybody sees - not just America, but the whole world should see that we have not made all the progress and accomplished all that we thought we did. More and more eyes are opening. We're still fighting for the same things we were fighting for in the '60s."

Washington D.C. residents Albert and Andrea Elliott brought their 12-year-old grandson, Jeremiah, to use the march as a teachable moment.

"I brought my grandson to his first march so he understands that what he is doing is right. We're teaching him solidarity - and that he can speak up and be non-violent without being afraid," she says. "We as a people have to stick together and be more involved. We have to go to the source, where the laws are made, to put our foot on their necks."

As they planned their attendance, Jeremiah asked about previous civil rights demonstrations, police violence, and tear gas.

"It's not fair to kill black people because you have the power and authority to do stuff like this that we can't," he says of his personal reasons for attending. "I don't think it's fair to kill black people for no reason."

University of Maryland students and Divine Nine fraternity members Marcus Davis, Justin Ferguson, and Akiel Pyant carried a "black Lives Matter"

banner. "I'm here because I'm concerned about the future. If our grandparents went through this, and we're going through this, Lord only knows what my grandchildren will go through," says Davis, a member of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity.

The light police presence blocked traffic and generally stayed out of the way as the loud

but peaceful processional traveled six blocks to the main stage at the foot of the Capitol's front lawn. Both national and international media were present, as well as union organizations, black Greek letter organizations, civic and grassroots organizations, student groups, and families. Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" and "What's Happening Brother" met the marchers as

they arrived at the main stage, where media trucks, government Suburbans, and a stilted press box overflowing with photographers flanked the crowds.

With the Capitol as a backdrop, the main stage featured a lineup of speakers including Representative Al Green (D-Texas), Newark, N.J. Mayor, Ras Baraka, Howard University
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Thousands of people marched from Freedom Plaza to the United States Capitol on Saturday, December 12, 2014 in the National "Justice For All" March. The event was sponsored by the National Action Network (NAN) to highlight police brutality and criminal justice reform in the United States. (Milbert O. Brown, Jr./NNPA)

NCCU Awards 600 Diplomas; Graduates Charged with Creating 'Positive Change'

More than 600 graduates of North Carolina Central University were awarded diplomas Saturday, Dec. 13, 2014, during the university's 124th annual Commencement Exercises.

During the ceremony, NCCU Chancellor Debra Saunders-White recognized two December graduates: Muhammed Jobe and Melissa Culbreth.

Jobe is a first-generation college graduate who moved to the U.S. from his home in Gambia in 2006. After working at Apple, he entered NCCU's School of Business. He will join Cisco Systems Advanced Lab Operations in Research Triangle Park upon graduation.

Saunders-White lauded Culbreth, a mental health counseling major, who is a veteran of the North Carolina Army National Guard and was its first female chaplain. Culbreth served in Iraq, earned a Bronze Star and has worked to help military veterans integrate back into civilian society. She also has been battling breast cancer as she completed her Master of Arts degree in mental health counseling.

Dr. Ibrahim Cisse, a 2004 NCCU physics graduate now teaching at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, gave the commencement address. He congratulated graduates for their hard work and dedication.

"Eagles, I am confident you all will become catalysts for positive change," Cisse said.

He also quoted NCCU alumnus from the class of 2010 Stephen Alsop, now enrolled in a joint M.D./Ph.D. program at Harvard Medical School and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in telling the graduates to remember "the only limitations are those you bring on yourselves."

Cisse thanked a host of faculty and staff members at NCCU and Durham Technical Community College for their support during his own undergraduate years. He credited his NCCU physics professor, Dr. Kinny Ken, for instilling in him a passion for physics research.

While at NCCU, Cisse pursued experiments involving the packing density of various shapes using objects he had on hand, an approach he dubbed "Eagle ingenuity." By coating his "favorite candy," M&Ms, with household paint, Cisse generated new findings that earned academic awards, including a chance to study physics in Paris. He went on to earn a doctorate in physics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Referencing recent protests over killings by police of unarmed black men, including the chokehold death of Eric Garner in Staten Island, he said: "It is my belief that if one of us can't breathe, none of us can breathe."

"Black lives matter - of course, all lives matter. Period. Regardless of a person's social or community standing," he told the audience.

Saunders-White concluded the ceremonies by saying, "Graduates, as you prepare to take on the challenges of your new or blossoming career, I urge you to remember that your voices and your actions are some of the most powerful means by which you can create positive change."

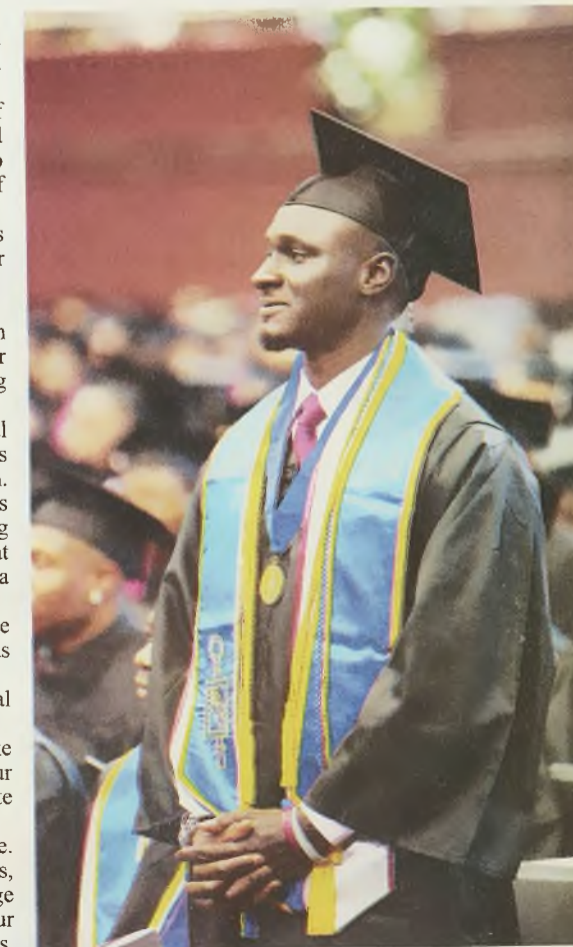
North Carolina Central University prepares students to succeed in the global marketplace. Flagship programs include science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines, nursing, education, law, business and the arts. Founded in 1910 as a liberal arts college for African-Americans, NCCU remains committed to diversity in higher education. Our alumni are among the nation's most successful scientists, researchers, educators, attorneys, artists and entrepreneurs. Visit www.nccu.edu.



John Williams, IV son of John Williams, III and Mrs. Jayme Del-Williams meets Santa at Hayti Heritage Center for a photograph. Warren Keys is a "Santa for ALL." Photographs can be purchased at the Center Dec. 20 and 21 at 804 Old Fayetteville St. Go to www.blacksanta.com

11 arrested in Durham during protest of police

(AP) - Durham police arrested 11 people in a nighttime protest that was part of a national wave demonstrations of killings by police. Police spokeswoman Kammie Michael said in a news release that about 50 protesters Saturday night (Dec. 13) marched on several streets near downtown and Duke University's East Campus. She says the protesters blocked traffic as they marched on several streets and were ordered to disperse as they approached the Durham Freeway. Michael says most of the protesters were charged with impeding traffic and failure to disperse. Media accounts say the protesters chanted "Black Lives Matter!" and "Hands up! Don't Shoot!"



Muhammed Jobe